



**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES**  
*Maryland's Social Services Agency*



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**For immediate release:**

October 30, 2009

**For more information:**

Elyn Garrett Jones

410-767-7758

[ejones@dhr.state.md.us](mailto:ejones@dhr.state.md.us)

**DHR USHERS IN NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH BY  
APPLAUDING FAMILIES FROM THE UPPER EASTERN SHORE**

*Caroline, Cecil, Queen Anne's and Talbot Counties name families of the year*

**BALTIMORE** – The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) got a head start on celebrating National Adoption Awareness month by honoring families from **Caroline, Cecil, Queen Anne's and Talbot Counties** that contributed to the **770 total adoptions** finalized during fiscal year 2009.

“We have much to celebrate,” said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald. We have seen a 15 percent reduction in the overall number of children in foster care; a 43 percent decline in group home placements; we have recruited 1,500 new foster parents since 2007; and we found families for 770 children during our last fiscal year.”

The successes Donald highlighted were driven by the Department's **Place Matters** initiative. This initiative builds on the premise that nothing matters more to a child than a place to call home.

Each of the local departments of social services honored families from their jurisdiction that adopted during the last year. These families were recognized for their commitment to adoption, their support of the agency's goals, and their efforts to produce the best possible outcomes for children. Upper Eastern Shore jurisdictions honored the following families:

**Caroline County Department of Social Services** recognized **Vicky and Ron Marquess**.

Mr. and Mrs. Marquess officially welcomed two little girls into their home who still maintain connections with their siblings and their birth parents. They have worked diligently from the beginning of the children's placement with them to support the birth parents and the sibling bond. They are a wonderful example of a family reaching and stretching to include all for the sake of their children.

**-More-**

- Martin O'Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brenda Donald, Secretary

**Cecil County Department of Social Services recognized Marianne and Rick Shull**

Mr. and Mrs. Shull have been foster parents for the past 18 years. They have three biological children and have adopted a total of eight children so far. They will adopt their ninth child soon. They have experienced much pride and joy in adopting children they have fostered over the years and they take their role as parents very seriously. They actively work with birth families towards the goal of reunification. The Shulls help to make sure the children love and respect their birth family and that they are also comfortable and bonded with their adoptive family.

**Queen Anne's County Department of Social Services recognized Darla and Mark Verdonck.**

The Verdonck family had three biological children when they became foster/adoptive parents in 2005. They wanted to give back to the community and help children in need. In 2006, they accepted a placement of a sibling group of three young children and later adopted all of them. From the first day that the children came to the Verdonck home they were treated as family. They have been loved, nurtured and embraced by all family members. The Verdoncks have provided a wonderful permanent home to the children and maintained while maintaining the children's bond with their birth parents.

**Talbot County Department of Social Services recognized Deborah Fletcher.**

Ms. Fletcher has been a foster parent since 2004. When Keontae (age 13) was placed with her Keontar displayed many challenging personal and family issues. However, Ms. Fletcher was able to provide her with a nurturing, structured and loving environment and ultimately adopted her just three months prior to Keontae's 17<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The celebration for the families was held at the Baltimore Zoo's Mansion House. In addition to an awards luncheon for their contributions, the families were also treated to an afternoon at the zoo with their children. "This is our 13<sup>th</sup> year of celebrating adoptions with an awards luncheon, but our families will tell you the biggest reward for them was being able to add these wonderful children to their families," Donald stated.

Additional information about this year's honorees can be found by visiting the DHR newsroom at [www.dhr.state.md.us](http://www.dhr.state.md.us) and clicking on the "Newsroom" tab on the left side of the page.

-More-

**The 2009 Families of the Year from jurisdictions across the state include:**

Allegany County	Eugene and Jeanne Miller
Anne Arundel County	Mark and Lisa Walinski
Baltimore City	Donald and Arnissa Ames Brandi Beckner Jim and Julia Forest Avan Howard Mark and Judy Schlothauer
Baltimore County	Jason and Donna Neidinger
Calvert County	Jerry-y and Mary Lee
Caroline County	Ron and Vicky Marquess
Carroll County	Marshall and Chrissie Thompson
Cecil County	Rick and Marianne Shull
Charles County	Lionel and Shelia Carroll
Dorchester County	Joseph and Glenda Smith
Frederick County	Douglas and Maureen Garlock
Garrett County	Danny and Barbara Baker
Harford County	Robert and Yvonne Cossey
Howard County	Deirdre Henderson
Montgomery County	Charlie and Jenni Weller
Prince George's County	Darla Sligh
Queen Anne's County	Mark and Darla Verdonck
St. Mary's County	Gary and Vickie Ferko
Somerset County	Jonathan and Cherry Conley
Talbot County	Deborah Fletcher
Washington County	Tom and Toni Barnhart
Wicomico County	Scott and Amy Ness
Worcester County	Augustine Cook

The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; and provide temporary cash, food stamps and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, migrant workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 638,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.

- Martin O'Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brenda Donald, Secretary